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# **Annual Meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation**

**Tropical Ecology and Society  
Reconciling Conservation and  
Sustainable Use of Biodiversity**

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**PROGRAM  
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## **O32-01 – S32** *Europe's role in driving the future of tropical forested landscapes*

Wednesday 22 June / 14:30-17:30 – Pasteur

### **Europe, environmental norms and incentives**

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Europe's "soft power" is based on norms, with a great emphasis on environmental ones. As the major commercial partner of more than 100 countries, norms adopted in Europe carry weight in non-European countries that seek to maintain or increase their market share. Europe's environmental norms are, therefore, considered well beyond Europe's boundaries.

Sustainable land-use and forestry norms have been particularly promoted by Europe, such as forest certification adopted in some European countries for public purchasing of timber. The most prominent initiative is the association between the EUTR (European Union Timber Regulation) and the FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) initiative under which Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) have been proposed to timber-exporting tropical countries. VPAs call for ensuring the consistency of national laws, propose an independent auditing of the national system of legality verification and a bilateral commercial agreement allowing timber with FLEGT authorisation to be imported in the EU without need for proof of due diligence. The tandem EUTR-FLEGT/VPAs also impact bilateral commercial relationships between, say, China and Indonesia, as Chinese's furniture made with Indonesian timber might be exported to the EU. As a consequence, some Chinese exporters are endorsing certification for their supply chains, and contribute to the diffusion of such standards in non-EU-markets.

EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020 states that "the EU will take measures to reduce the biodiversity impact of EU consumption patterns". This is why "zero-deforestation" commodity chains are the new issue involving Europe and some of its largest multinational corporations. Such commitments will have a worldwide impact and competitors are forced to endorse the same ones.

But the main difficulty for Europe will be to go beyond the formal endorsement of norms. FLEGT/VPAs implementation has been delayed, and no FLEGT authorisation has yet been delivered. In Indonesia, zero deforestation is contested by unions of small-medium oil palm producers, and challenged by local governments, in spite of government commitment. For tropical countries to endorse standards, Europe relies on a simplified version of the "theory of incentives", assuming stakeholders will become aware of the collective benefits they could expect. Unfortunately, the political economy dimension of the decision processes is more complex.

## **O32-02 – S32** *Europe's role in driving the future of tropical forested landscapes*

Wednesday 22 June / 14:30-17:30 – Pasteur

### **Globalised drivers of land use changes on tropical forest frontiers: the concept of 'telecoupling' and its operationalisation in land system science**

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Landscapes on forest frontiers in the humid tropics provide powerful examples of the challenge to reconcile human development with increasingly evident planetary boundaries. These social-ecological systems not only have to meet the immediate livelihood needs and the broader development aspirations of their local populations. They are also expected to ensure the complex mix of ecosystem service flows that support human well-being locally and provide environmental benefits worldwide. At the same time, global forces have come to outweigh local determinants of land use change in these landscapes. Driven by demands for agricultural expansion and intensification, fuel, carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and more, these forces consist of combined socio-economic and environmental interactions between two or more distant socio-ecological systems. Land change scientists have recently conceptualized this phenomenon under the term «telecoupling».

Current research endeavours seek to operationalize this new concept with a view to overcome major methodological and empirical research gaps. This paper reports on one such research project, which analyses the effects of telecoupling on forested landscapes in Southeast Asia and Africa and explores potentials for transformations towards sustainable development. First we will reveal major challenges and potential pitfalls of the telecoupling concept relating to questions such as (i) what are meaningful boundaries of social-ecological systems that allow us to define what is considered in- and outside? (ii) how can we avoid the holistic trap where everything is connected to everything? (iii) what entry points do we chose for our analysis, is it a social-ecological system or a connecting flow? We will then illustrate that these pitfalls can only be avoided, if the telecoupling challenge is closely related to the normative question of sustainable development. Only by focusing on land use processes that represent key sustainability challenges and by systematically exploring the winners and losers of such dynamics are we able to make the necessary analytical choices needed to avoid arbitrariness of focus and the holistic trap. Once these choices are transparent, we can design the research approach and adequate methodologies. We will present concrete examples from the forested landscapes in Northern Laos to demonstrate how these conceptual insights are currently operationalised.